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ABSTRACT

Reported are findings on the effectiveness of the Family Education Program (FEP) of the Early Childhood Intervention Project, a program of the Social and School Adjustment Research Group of the University of Quebec in Montreal. In general, the findings suggest that, under certain conditions, it is possible to get parents to participate in an educational intervention with their preschool children. The first half of the paper establishes the rationale for the FEP and outlines, by way of illustration, the content of the first 2 of 12 FEP sessions. All sessions require active participation of parents, and consist of discussion, training, and knowledge acquisition periods. These periods mainly concern children's behavior, language, psychomotor abilities, reasoning, and emotional expression. The remainder of the report focuses on program evaluation findings about (1) the frequency of parent participation at sessions; (2) the degree of parent satisfaction; and (3) change in parents' attitudes and educational practices. (RH)

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PRESCHOOL EDUCATION: A RESPONSIBILITY TO BE SHARED WITH PARENTS

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"Nowhere can one learn the profession of parent, but parenting is still one of the most important jobs in our society" as Osterrieth wrote in Improving education for disadvantaged children (p.190)

At a time when no one wishes to deny the necessity of a quality preschool education, the evolution of both our society and our educational system strongly confirms the above-mentioned opinion. Since the works of Gesell and al (1940), Piaget (1957), Bloom (1964), or White (1975), one need not prove the importance of the first six years of a life to the preparing of ulterior experiences and the creation of personality. Furthermore, with the serious disruption of the traditional family brought upon by the coming of women on the work force, the increase in the number of single-parent families, and the decreasing size of families (falling of the birthrate, grandparents leaving the family home), the importance of developing structures capable of partially replacing the family for educational purposes, has become greater. Finally, because of the growing number of children with learning and adjusting disabilities, research, such as that of Gordon (1969), Weikart (1972), Hillard and Shearer (1976), Lazar and al (1977), Zimiles (1979), or Bagnato and al (1980), to cite only a few, has displayed the positive effects of early

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stimulation for handicapped children, of compensatory education for children of "vulnerable" populations, and of prevention in general throughout preschool education.

However, the network of preschool education services, for children between the ages of 0 and 6, is still quite limited and answers only partially to the needs of most north american countries. The province of Quebec is no exeption, for, unlike european countries where kindergaten generally starts at the age of 2, according to Kamerman (1980), the children of Quebec with the exception of a few cases, cannot take advantage of such schooling until the age of 5. Finally, the day-care service network answers only partially to the demands of families, for, according to Garon (1985), in Quebec, of 557,00 children, only 30,000 were going to a day-care center in 1983, and 197,00 were only benefiting from home-care services.

We can therefore say that the family, where the child spends most of his time, is still responsible for most of the educational intervention. Furthermore, according to Osterrieth (1977), the prevalence of this situation poses the problem of the contemporary-family preparing to assume this responsibility in the present sociological and economic context, in particular for socio-economically disadvantaged families, for immigrant families, belonging to cultures other than ours, and with values other than ours. As far as families with handicapped children or with children with learning and adjusting difficulties are concerned, they are the most disadvantaged for, quite often, the

services, in particular the services offered by the Social Affairs network, remain scattered, hard to identify, and hard of access for uninformed parents, and most of all insufficient in terms of intervention time.

In order to face up to this inadequacy of means, we are now seeing a tendancy to make restitution of a part of the educational responsibility to the family of a preschool child, developing certain approaches allowing parents to participate in the educational process.

This tendancy fits perfectly in the "normalization" process actually taking place in Quebec education, i.e, as described by Wolfensberger (1972), "using the most normative means as possible in a given culture in order to favour and to maintain the most normative behaviours in this culture". Therefore there is no normative sociocultural environment for the child other than his own family.

Finally, the research done by various early childhood intervention projects has demonstrated the multiple positive effects of the parents' participation in these interventions. Goodson and Hess (1975), then Goodwin and Driscoll (1980), mention the following consequences:

- The educational intervention's effects last a long time for, even though "intervention" does not last, in such cases as early childhood intervention, parents have developped new attitudes and new educational practices as shown by

Bronfenbrenner (1978) and Slaugther (1980). Therefore, since the works of Osterrieth (1957), of Scheafer and Bayley (1963), and, most of all, of Pourtois (1979), we know that the preschool child's achievement is intimitely linked with the types of attitudes and practices adopted by parents. Furthermore, the control codes "personal - subjective" and "cognitive - rational" are more favorable than the codes "imperative - normative" and, as far as attitudes are concerned, the poles "flexibility" and "elaboration" are more favorable than the "rigidity" and "limitation" poles.

- The abilities acquired by the parents throughout the intervention are eventually transmissible to the family's other children.

- The families' specific needs can be better identified.

- The collaboration with educators is improved and the ulterior participation to school life is increased.

We can also add that parents, if they establish that their child, even though handicapped, is susceptible of new learnings, maintain a stimulating attitude towards the child, which will bring other learnings, therefore an increased stimulation on their behalf, etc. according to an interactive parent-child dynamic process, which will translate itself by minute gains on the part of the child as Hayden and McGinnes (1978) mentionned.

The participation on the part of parents to preschool education is quite advantageous, but it is important to mention what particular strategies should be used.

Gordon (1972) as well as Goodwin and Driscoll (1980) have analyzed the participation of families to preschool education programs and have gathered the following models:

- parents receive some information from report-cards, parent-teacher meetings, documentation, various meetings, etc.;

- parents become students of a family education program which comes in three different types:

  family education program where parents take courses on child development;

  family education program where parents take part in group discussions;

  family education program where parents are trained to acquire new educational abilities;

- parents are volunteers in a family education program to which their child is taking part in;

- parents are members of a program committee in a family education program.

It is from this data, that the Social and School Adjustment Research Group of the Université du Quebec à Montréal has elaborated, then experimented the Family Education Program,

F.E.P., (1985), for parents taking part in the Early Childhood Intervention Project, E.C.I.P., (1983).

This project, introduced in Laval since 1982, offers children between the ages of 3 to 5 the possibility to take part, during six months, in an educational activity program, the Early Childhood Intervention Program, E.C.I.P., (1983). The program consists of three weekly half-day sessions at a Laval center. Before the child enters the program, an inventory of the childs "acquisitions" is taken in order to see if some of them have some sort of backwardness or difficulty. Children with difficulties are integrated into groups of 18, in a proportion of 1/3 for 2/3 of children with no "problems". If they cannot reach the group's objectives, the intervention becomes more individualized and the parents will benefit from a homebound program. Parents are also invited to take part, during six months, to by-monthly evening meetings. These meetings make up the Family Education Program (1985) which itself is made up of twelve sessions, the first one beeing one of presentation, and the last one of evaluation and of final synthesis. The other ten are devoted to five essential themes (behaviour, language, psychomotor abilities, reasoning and emotional expression), respecting the following process:

First Session

1. Presentation to the parents, by the animator, of an audio-visual document (video) entitled: You are your child's education (Terrisse and al, 1985) illustrating various

problematic situations of the chosen theme and involving young children. It serves as an introduction to the discussion theme while provoking questioning on the part of parents.

2. Parent discussion (groups of 4 or 5), in order to elaborate solutions to the educational problems raised by the above-mentioned audio-visual document.

3. Group analysis, with the animator, of the interventions proposed by the parents; the chosen interventions will later constitute part of the content of the educational thematic booklets handed to the parents (on one hand we are aiming towards the responsibilization and the valorization of parents, and on the other hand, towards the elaboration of solutions culturally significant to the child).

4. Parents, once again grouped in 4 or 5, will work in the Family Education Program activity workbook (Terrisse and al,1985) in order to facilitate the discussion of each theme, while respecting the next stages:

- observation
  - of behaviors (learning, communication, etc.);
  - of parent reaction;
  - of child reaction;
  - of context (environment);

- evaluation of the behaviors, the context, etc. by each and every parent, then discussion on the evaluating of other parents of one's group (therefore there will be some sort of exchange

between parents of their respective educational values);

- each parent chooses appropriate educational interventions, and then the other parents evaluate these choices by "brainstorming". (parents exchange ideas on educational interventions and training towards the acquisition of educational abilities, in particular for parents of children with difficulties);

5. Group analysis, with the animator, of the interventions proposed by the parents: the chosen interventions will later constitute part of the content of the educational thematic booklets ulterially handed to the parents (same objectives as in stage 3).

6. Parents are handed the booklets constituting the Home Educational Activity Program (Terrisse and al, 1985) which will allow for home activities in relation, if necessary, with weaknesses noticed by the parents in the by-monthly report card of their child taking part in the Early Childhood Intervention Program (1983). (Parents can therefore continue to work on these objectives, at home with their child, while pursuing or strengthening the acquisitions which the latter has made through the program.

Second Session

It still concentrates on the same theme as the preceding one and takes place as follows:

1. The animator presents the meeting's objectives.

2. Subgroup evaluation, done by parents, of the home-activities they have done with their child as well as of the activities' effects. Parents can use the Individual Evaluation (Terrisse, 1986) which allows them to judge these activities.

3. Parents suggest ways in which the proposed activities could be improved or they propose other activities based on the same theme, which can be written on the same sheet as before, or recorded on tape (we are therefore aiming on responsibilization and active participation on the part of parents in a "normalization" perspective as far as the sociocultural plan is concerned).

4. Group analysis, with the animator, of the evaluation of the home-activities and of the parent subgroup's proposed suggestions; all of the chosen suggestions will be inserted in the thematic booklets which will later be handed to them (same objective as in phase 3 of session one).

5. Information and exchange: the meeting's second part is devoted to an oral presentation, done by a invited resource person, on the session's theme, then to a question period, and finally to discussion with parents on that theme.

These session therefore demand active participation on the part of parents and are made up of exchange and discusion periods between parents (attitudes evolution and parent integration), of training periods (acquisition of educational abilities and techniques, such as observation and reformulation, in a context of responsibilization and of intervention creation socio-economically significant), and finally of information periods (knowledge acquisition).

This program has been experimented (every year since 1984) with two heterogeneous groups of approximately thirty (30) parents. The groups are made of parents of children with learning difficulties, of parents of children without adaptation difficulties, of parents of socio-economically different status (socio-economically disadvantaged environment) as well as immigrant parents belonging to ethnic minorities.

The program's effects have been evaluated using a statistic process in order to determine if all or only part of the objectives had been reached. Let us reiterate the objectives:

- the emergence of attitudes and of educational practices in view of the axis of "control-autonomy", "rigidity-flexibility", "limitation-elaboration", "coldness-heat", etc.

- the improving of self-image in terms of educational competences (valorization)

- the responsibilization and the autonomy towards the intervention of "specialists"

- the acquisition of knowledge

- the training for acquisition of educational abilities

The whole approach has to be placed within the concept of "normalization" and has to aim towards the integration of children with adaptation difficulties as well as with parents from different environments.

According to Goodwin and Driscoll (1980), the educational programs' effects can be evaluated as follows:

1- Frequency of parent participation

2- Degree of parent satisfaction

3- The evolution of attitudes and of the parents' educational practices

4- The parents' acquired knowledge

5- The children's acquired knowlege

As part of this research project, we have evaluated the first four criteria in two years of experimentation (1984-85 and 1985-86). In order to concentrate on the first three criteria, we are omitting the program's effects on children (another article, in this work, has been devoted to this subject).

1rst criterion:

Frequency of parent participation at sessions

Parent participation at all of the twelve (12) sessions has been regularly recorded, and the following distinctions have been made:

- The mother has come alone at the meeting: P1
- The father has come alone at the meeting: P2
- The couple has come to the meeting : P3
- One or the other parent or the couple has come to the meeting : P4

This analysis method has been called the Parent Participation Frequency Analysis,P.P.F.A., (1985). Graphic I shows the parent participation in number and in percentage. It is important to note, on one part, that more than half of the parents participate, on a volunteer basis not an obligatory one, to sessions, and on another part that parents of children without difficulties have a tendancy to participate quite more (63%) than parents of children with difficulties (50%) when the latter could be more advantaged by their participation. This might indicate that parents of children without any difficulties are more involved in the educational process, which would in part explain the fact that their child has less difficulty than those of other parents.

These participation percentages seem quite positive if compared to the parent participation rate in public school

meetings (less than 20%), according to polls conducted within ten school committees in Laval.

Graphics II and III show on a sample of sixty (60) parents the exact number of meetings at which have respectively attended the mother,the father and the couple and, as a total, the family. We have not included participation to the first and last meetings of information and evaluation. Furthermore, these graphics display the fact that mothers participate much more than fathers, which tends to prove that child education is still the women's appanage, and that the two members of the couple participate quite rarely together, which can be explained in part by the babysitting problem...

We have established a distinction between "irregular" participation (fewer than five meetings) and "regular" participation (five meetings or more). We have in fact noticed, in another part of this research project, that would be too long to explain, using the correlation method (Pearson) together with other evaluation "instruments", the Parent Attitudes and Educational Practices Evaluation Questionnaire, P.A.E.P.E.Q. (Rouzier, 1986) and the Parent Perception Questionnaire, P.P.Q., (Terrisse and Joly, 1986), that there was not any statistically significative modification of attitudes, of practices and of perceptions for parents if they did not participate to at least five sessions.

2nd criterion:

Degree of parent satisfaction

We have used, in order to evaluate the F.E.P., six questions from the Project Evaluation Questionnaire, P.E.Q., Terrisse (1984), a questionnaire used by parents in order to evaluate the whole project (the six questions concerning the F.E.P. are answered only by those who have participated to the sessions).

We can easily notice, in graphic IV, that the degree of satisfaction is quite high, but we have to take into account the part of subjectivity for the Early Childhood Intervention Project offers to the population a one-of-a-kind educational resource in the area of Laval.

Graphic I: Parent Participation (F.P.P.) to session of the F.E.P. in 1984-1985, according to the classification of the children - Experimental Group (N=83)

	N. of families	N. of part. fam.	N. of fam. not part.	% of part. (P4)
Families with a child without difficulties	43	27	16	63%
Families with a child with minor difficulties	28	14	14	50%
Families with a child with serious difficulties	12	6	6	50%
	83	47	36	54%

P4 = Family participation: one parent or the other or the couple present at at least five sessions.

Graphic II: *Parent Participation (F.P.P.) to session of the F.E.P. in 1985-1986, according to the type of family representation - Experimental Group (N=60)

	Mothers (P1)	Fathers (P2)	Couples (P3)	Fam. (P4)
No participation	11	25	38	4
Irregular participation	17	28	16	23
Regular participation	32	7	6	33
% of part.	53.33%	11.6%	10%	55%

* Irregular participation: less than five sessions.
Regular participation: five sessions or more.

Graphic II: Frequency of Parent Participation (F.P.P.) to session of the F.E.P. in 1985-1986, according to the type of family representation - Experimental Group (N=60)

Number of sessions	P1	P2	P3	P4
0	11	25	38	4
1	6	13	6	8
2	7	7	4	6
3	2	2	1	5
4	2	6	5	4
5	5	1	1	5
6	8	0	0	6
7	4	2	3	5
8	9	1	0	10
9	2	1	1	1
10	4	2	1	6

Part. of mother (P1), of father (P2), of couple (P3), of family (P4)

Graphic IV: Parent Evaluation of the F.E.P. sessions in 1984-1985 - Experimental Group (N= 100)

	Yes	Fairly	No	D.N.A.
Q.21 Were the F.E.P. sessions satisfying in general?	92	4	0	4
Q.22 Were the schedules satisfying?	90	6	0	4
Q.23 Was the location satisfying?	94	2	0	4
Q.24 Was the content (discussed themes) satisfying?	88	8	0	4
Q.25 Were the methods satisfying?	81	13	0	0
	89%	6.6%	0%	4.4%
Q.35 If you know parents with a child the same age as yours, would you recommend the F.E.P.?	98	0	2	0

3rd criterion:

The evolution of attitudes and of the parents' educational practices

We wanted to verify this third hypothesis with the help of the Parent Attitudes and Educational Practices Evaluation Questionnaire, P.A.E.P.E.Q. (Rouzier, 1986). This "instrument is administred as a pre-test and a post-test to the experimental group (parents having attended at least five F.E.P. sessions), and then to a control group (having not participated to the project) as shown in graphic V.

Graphic VI displays significant correlations between the evolution of attitudes and of educational practices as well as that of the experimental group's parent participation to sessions. On one hand, attitudes have evolved quite significantly as far as mothers, the family and the couple (fathers not participating enough) are concerned, and on the other hand, the practices have also evolved, at a slower pace, as far as mothers and the family are concerned. Mother participation is still the dominant factor of this evolution, and it is without any doubt this participation which is found in the family evolution for it makes up 4/5th of the family presence (See graphic II).

Finally, the comparison established by graphics VII and VIII between the control group and the experimental group shows that the latter's attitudes and educational practices have significantly evolved (a bit less for attitudes) while the contro

group is not statistically evolving. This therefore tends to prove that the F.E.P. sessions have a significant impact on the parents' attitudes and educational practices.

Graphic V: The composition of research sampling in 1985-1986

		Pre-test	Post-test	*P4	Considered Sampling
Experimental Group	N =	60	60	33	33
Control Group	N =	51	19	-	19

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* P4 = Family participation: one parent or the other or the couple attending at least five sessions.

Graphic VI: Post-test intercorrelations between attitudes and educational practices (P.A.E.P.E.Q.) and the frequency of parent participation to F.E.P. sessions (P.P.F.A.) in 1985-1986
Experimental Group (N = 60)

	Mother part.(P1)	Father part.(P2)	Couple part.(P3)	Family part.(P4)
Educational practices				
correlations (r)	0.246*	0.157	0.131	0.291*
ass. pro. (p)	(0.029)	(0.116)	(0.160)	(0.012)
Educational attitudes				
correlations (r)	-0.463***	-0.153	-0.303**	-0.385***
ass. prob. (p)	(0.000)	(0.121)	(0.009)	(0.001)

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* 0.05 significant
** 0.01 significant
*** 0.001 significant

Graphic VII: Evolution of the parents' attitudes and educational practices in each group, experimental and control, from the pre-test to the post-test, in 1985-1986

Averages ($\bar{X}$), standard deviations (s), Pearson correlations (r), Student t. for dependant groups and associated probability (p) obtained by parents at P.A.E.P.E.Q.
(P4, participation to five sessions or more)

1. Experimental Group

	N	$\bar{X}$	s	r	t	d.l.	p
Educational practices							
Pre-test	33	98.67	12.67	0.59	-3.09	32	0.004**
Post-test		104.58	11.47				
Educational attitudes							
Pre-test	32	48.72	9.98	0.70	1.88	31	0.070*
Post-test		46.09	10.35				

2. Control Group

Educational practices							
Pre-test	19	102.47	8.11	0.43	-0.37	18	0.717
Post-test		103.21	8.30				
Educational attitudes							
Pre-test	19	52.90	9.81	0.27	0.68	18	0.503
Post-test		51.05	9.68				

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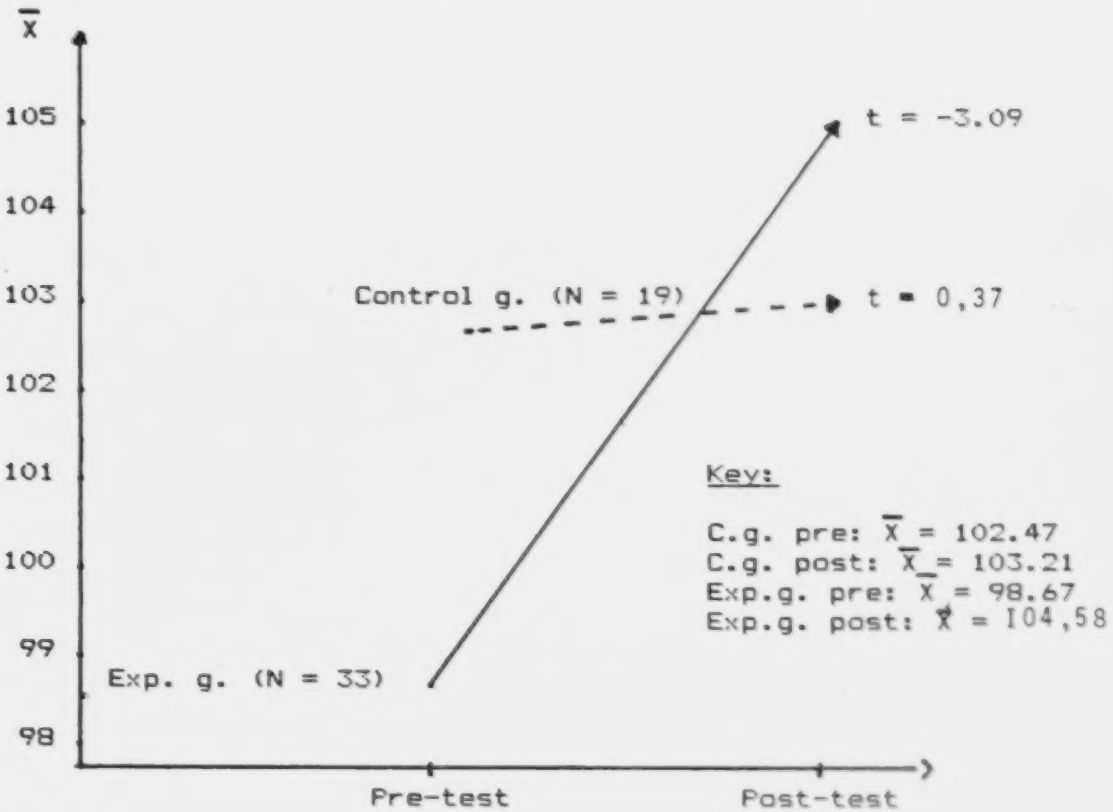
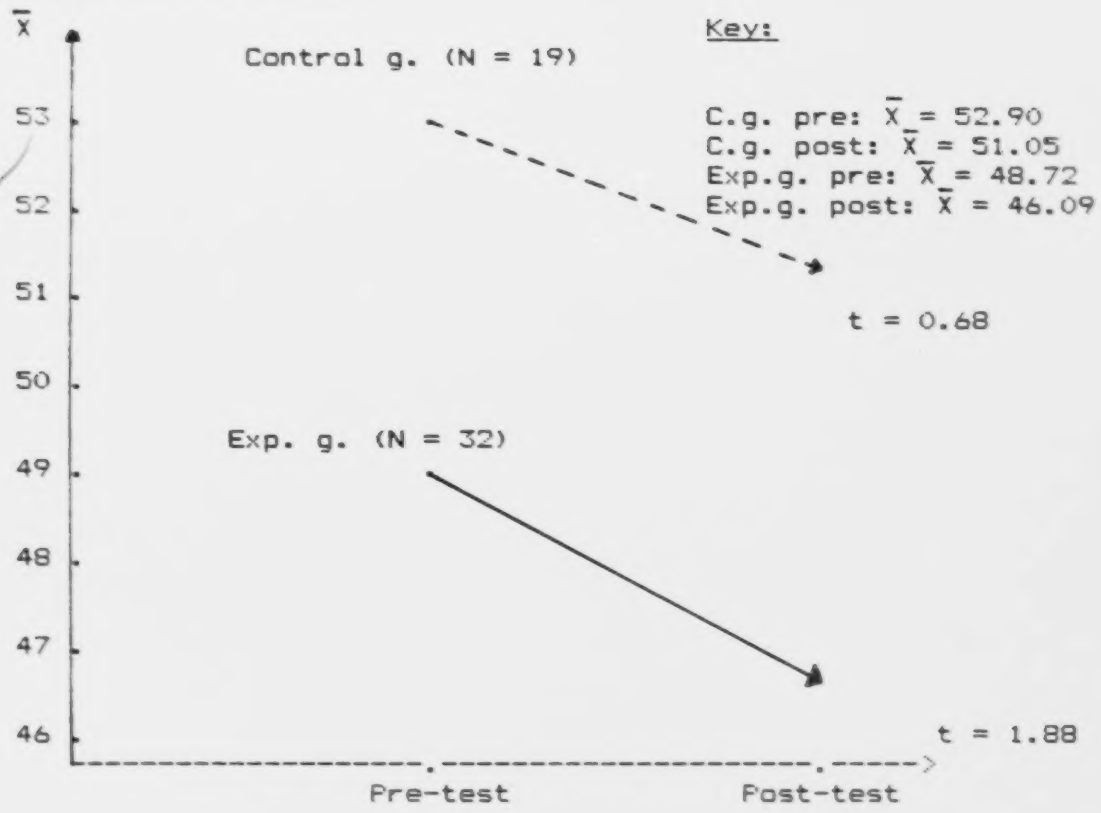
* 0.10 significant
** 0.05 significant

Graphic VIII: Graphic representation (slopes) of the evolution of the parents' educational practices and attitudes in each group, experimental and control, from the pre-test to the post-test, in 1985-1986

I- Educational practices



II- Educational attitudes



In conclusion, the actual results of our research seem quite interesting, for they tend to prove that it may be possible to request the parents' participation, and to succeed in getting them to participate in their preschool children's educational intervention, as long as they are presented with a structured plan requesting, on one hand, their own competence and actual experiences, and on the other hand, by joining discussion, information and training processes to the whole idea.

This research is far from being over and is most probably going to take advantage of a quantity of other analysis intented to improve not only the program itself, but also the sessions' content and the means of evaluation. We therefore think that family education is one of the best ways in which one may palliate to the insufficiency of infancy educational services, in particular for socio-economically weak families, for ethnic minorities, and finally for families where the child is handicapped or in difficulty. In the latter case, the Family Education Program may well be a major complementary contribution to early childhood stimulation programs (quite important for parents of mentally, physically or sensorily handicapped children).

Preschool education is therefore, as far as we are concerned, a responsibility to be shared with parents, but without imposing on them our responsibility as "professional" educators and without putting on their shoulders the weight of our failures. Alain Toffler may have well sensed this

"tentation" when he wrote in 1970 "Parent professionalism will never be halted...today this social innovation is favored by a discrete but quite powerful trend." Le choc du futur (p.277)

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